DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 046 536 PS 004 233

TITLE	The Child and Leisure Time. 1970 White House Conference on Children, Report of Forum 21. (Working Copy).
INSTITUTION	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	70
NOTE	17p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Child Development, *Childhood Needs, *Creative Activities, *Leisure Time, Objectives, Play, *Recreational Activities

ABSTRACT

Creative leisure activities make a profound contribution to the child's emotional, psychological, physical, aesthetic, and spiritual growth. We, as a nation, have failed to emphasize the importance of leisure experiences upon the individual. The prime obstacles have been two prejudicial attitudes: (1) that leisure is intrinsically less worthy than work, and (2) that survival skills are more worthy than those activities enjoyed for their own sake. A variety of leisure options should exist in the home, at school, and in the community. Our country has provided, at best, an uncoordinated patchwork of public, private, commercial, and voluntary programs that may neglect the less affluent child. One basic national goal should be to design a total leisure climate to facilitate growth in every child. Specific recommendations to accomplish this goal include having the government initiate policies to plan and deliver leisure opportunities for children, making more effective use of mobile and portable units to extend cultural and recreational opportunities into rural and urban environments, having universities develop proper attitudes concerning leisure and leisure proficiencies in their students, and expanding research and development endeavors in the area. (WY)

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THE CHILD AND LEISURE TIME

Report of Forum 21

1970 White House Conference on Children

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SUMMARY

In a democracy, leisure time is one of the most important resources available to the individual, the family, the community, the state, and the nation. Leisure offers the individual the greatest chance to develop his personal identity and realize his fullest potential. For children, creative leisure is particularly important because of the profound contribution those activities make to the child's emotional, psychological, physical, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual growth.

As a nation, we have failed to emphasize sufficiently the importance of leisure experiences upon the individual. The prime obstacles have been two prejudical attitudes: one, the puritanical view prevalent among older Americans, that leisure is intrinsically less worthy than work. The second holds that childhood is essentially a preparatory phase; activities that lead to some survival skill are considered more worthy than other activities enjoyed for their own sake.

It is not enough to be concerned with only one or a few leisure environments for the child; a variety of leisure options should exist in the home, at school, and in the community.

Throughout the United States, providing acceptable leisure activities for children is the responsibility of an uncoordinated patchwork of public, private, commercial, and voluntary organizations, institutions, and agencies. The present lack of coordination guarantees that many children will be neglected. And despite

our protestations of the right of every child to leisure opportunities, our past actions suggest that we believe affluent children deserve better leisure opportunities. The development of leisure for the rich continues to outpace that for the poor.

Our basic goal is a total leisure climate designed to facilitate normal psychological, social, physical, and intellectual growth and development of every American child. To attain this goal, we recommend:

1. Federal, state, and local governments and private agencies should initiate more effective cooperative relationships in the planning and delivery of leisure opportunities for children.
2. Local, regional, and state planners and decision-makers should make more extensive use of mobile and portable units as an efficient, economical, and highly flexible approach to providing cultural and recreational opportunities in both urban and rural settings.
3. The nation's educational institutions at all levels -- local, regional, and state -- should renew their commitment to play the central role in developing proper attitudes concerning leisure and leisure proficiencies among students.
4. Research and development in leisure time activities should be greatly expanded by the federal and state governments.

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WE BELIEVE

In a democracy, leisure is the most important resource available to the individual, the family, the community, the state, and the nation. Leisure is more than unobligated time; it is a state or condition during which the individual is most able to develop his personal identity and to realize his intellectual, cultural, physical, and other potential. Lifelong leisure attitudes are significantly influenced and enduring patterns and habits are established during childhood. It is therefore imperative that a national commitment be directed to develop a leisure climate in which every child can sample and explore a variety of beneficial experiences. This conviction is based upon the presupposition that the basic needs of the child must be met before the promises of leisure can be realized.

In the development of a leisure climate for children, two nationwide prejudical attitudes have been prime obstacles. One is a puritanical view, prevalent among older Americans, that leisure is intrinsically less worthy than work. Children form attitudes and learn skills from the family. If the family does not value and properly use leisure, children will not either. The second attitude is that childhood is essentially a preparatory phase; an activity that leads to some survival skill is considered more worthy than another activity enjoyed by the child for its own sake. The here-and-now of childhood is often mortgaged for the future; many feel play is unimportant. "Kids are just playing" is a statement often revealing the attitude that it is not necessary to actively enrich

the lives of children; but children are people and deserve the same attention to their leisure needs as youth and adults.

Most of the leisure activities currently available for children primarily benefit the affluent; we have not yet recognized that certain leisure opportunities are essential to <u>all</u> children. Although approximately one-fourth of the land mass of the United States is designated for recreational use, and overall leisure opportunities have expanded in recent decades, the development of leisure for the affluent continues to outpace that for the poor. Local agencies that serve the lower middle class and the poor are continually plagued by insufficient funds.

In disadvantaged communities leisure activity is often low in priority because it is only one of many needs with which agencies must cope. A commitment to leisure -- in fact, the very existence of leisure -- requires the prior satisfaction of the basic needs of life, but leisure for the poor is too often simply ignored rather than made a part of a multi-purpose program. Despite our protestations of the right of <u>every</u> child to leisure opportunities, our past actions suggest that we believe only those children with successful parents, as measured by our materialistic standards, deserve better leisure opportunities.

Not only is there an ever-widening leisure opportunity gap between America's rich and poor, but there also appears to be discrimination <u>within</u> the ranks of the poor children, usually the result of geographic accident. For example, if the child is lucky enough to live in a "selected city" (not a rural area) and be in a "target area" (not too near a suburb), then he may

be privileged to enjoy free lunches at his playground, have access to a portable swimming pool for a few hours, or be bussed to a major league baseball game, a concert or zoo, or even a state park for a day.

Unfortunately, these options are frequently initiated as cooling remedies to overheated situations, a direct response to urban unrest. They should, instead, be used to prevent citizen discontent created by unmet human needs. They should be available to a much wider range of children; they are examples of the essential leisure opportunities needed by all children.

To create a climate in which all have access to adequate leisure activity, we must consider the problems of not only the child with nothing to do, but also the child with "everything" to do -- the child who has so many recreational activities available to him, or even forced upon him, that leisure becomes an obligation. A satisfactory leisure climate should maximize the child's personal options while minimizing obligations.

We should not underestimate the importance of a variety of options in the various settings the child may inhabit. It is not enough to be concerned with only one or a few leisure environments for the child; opportunities should exist within the home, at school, and in the community which offer passive as well as active challenges and provide for individual as well as group effort.

Cultural pluralism abounds in America and leisure offers the greatest opportunity for diversity. Children from various groups should be, but generally are not, afforded a leisure

climate conducive to expression appropriate to their culture. We must give the fullest possible freedom to every group to preserve the songs, dances, games, and other pastimes unique and precious to its people.

We must also, of course, encourage leisure activities that take into consideration the rights of others. In a democracy, freedom is not absolute; it carries with it social responsibility.

Throughout the United States, providing acceptable leisure activities for children is the responsibility of an uncoordinated patchwork of public, private, commercial, and voluntary organizations, institutions, and agencies. Their mandate to provide a portion of the leisure climate for a minimally identified clientele virtually guarantees that many children will be neglected. Accountability and responsibility are diffused to the vanishing point; hand-wringing replaces deliberate action addressed to a specific charge.

Compounding the problem of providing adequate leisure experiences are the accelerating changes occurring within society and its institutions. Changes in family structures, working patterns, educational systems, population pressures, ecological concerns, technological advances, mobility patterns, transportation and communication developments, and other fundamental processes and events will have a great impact upon the leisure climate for America's children.

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GOALS

Recognizing that leisure is an extremely important resource, our basic goal is to provide a total leisure climate designed to facilitate normal psychological, social, physical, and intellectual growth and development of every American child. The community as well as federal, state, and local institutions should share the responsibility of ensuring that wide varieties of beneficial leisure opportunities are provided for children.

Specifically, forum goals are to:

1. Set priorities that will close the gap in leisure opportunities.
2. Eliminate attitudinal obstacles to the delivery of constructive leisure opportunities to all.
3. Eliminate institutional obstacles, coordinate all planning efforts, and establish some mechanism for effective contact between institutions and local communities. The actual delivery of programs and services should be decentralized and recipient family and community members, including children, should be encouraged to participate in determining the specific leisure climate.
4. Encourage diverse forms of leisure expression.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To attain the goals presented above, this forum offers the following recommendations:

1. Federal, state, and local governments and private agencies should initiate more viable machinery which

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will result in effective cooperative relationships in the planning and delivery of leisure opportunities for children.

Of particular significance are the following:

- Local, state, and national agencies and organizations must intensify joint long-range physical, social, and financial planning, and research and development activities.
- Citizens must demand the multi-functional and multi-jurisdictional use of public facilities, equipment, and apparatus, particularly at the local level. Still to be achieved in too many American communities is the joint use of community libraries, learning centers, swimming pools, cultural facilities, playgrounds, parks, and other recreational areas.[1]
- The joint employment of specialists, particularly by local and state agencies and organizations, is promising and should be fully explored and utilized.
- The federal, state, and local governments should give immediate attention to and earnestly seek ways to remove real and imaginary legal, financial, organizational, and communicative constraints which inhibit the closer coordination and cooperation in joint planning efforts of public and private agencies.
- The greater use of interstate and intrastate regional planning agencies to initiate and operate cultural and recreational opportunities between states and

within individual states should be encouraged. To be most effective, the planning efforts of regions closely related geographically, economically, or socially must be coordinated on an area-wide basis. This is true for both metropolitan and non-metropolitan centers. Regional planning agencies should be promoted legally and extra-legally by the states and the federal government. Further, regional planning agencies should be granted authority to evaluate and approve all federal and state planning activities of their constituency. An initial effort of regional planning agencies should be to develop a profile of available community and regional cultural, recreational, and educational opportunities.

- The federal government should modify its current methods of intervention in the activities of local and state agencies by providing positive supportive efforts designed to strengthen local and state, public and private organizations rather than mount sporadic, short-term programs that tend to compete with or disrupt existing efforts.
- The federal government should consider the establishment of a Leisure Services Administration with administrative and operating authority over all existing and proposed recreation and park programs. Without a single agency responsible for planning, coordinating,

and operating federal recreation/park/leisure programs, government efforts, however laudable, will continue to overlap as well as leave needs unmet. A Leisure Services Administration should help to avoid duplication and fragmentation of services by offering policy planning and program assistance, review and evaluation services, and consultation and technical aid to other federal departments and divisions. Because the only two federal agencies which now focus primarily on recreation, parks, and leisure services (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and the National Park Service) are now located in the United States Department of the Interior, it seems appropriate that the Leisure Services Administration be located there.

- The state government should be encouraged to implement permissive legislation which would establish the child advocacy system as described in the report of the Joint Commission on the Mental Health of Children.

2. Local, regional, and state planners and decision-makers should make more extensive use of mobile and portable units as an efficient, economical, and highly flexible approach to providing cultural and recreational opportunities in both urban and rural settings.

   Greater use of the mobile concept can do much to preserve program options in the delivery of leisure

programs and services in our ever-changing environment. Among the more promising and proven types of mobile units which can make meaningful, diverse, and rewarding leisure activities economically available to many children are the craftsmobile, artmobile, bookmobile, filmmobile, playmobile, circusmobile, naturemobile, zoomobile, sciencemobile, band/or show wagon, portable stage/or platform, physical fitness trailer, the portable swimming pool, and the mobile music laboratory.[2]

3. The nation's educational institutions at all levels -- local, regional, and state -- should renew their commitment to play the central role in developing proper attitudes concerning leisure and leisure proficiencies among students.

Some of the more significant ways that this renewed commitment can be reflected are:

- Implement meaningful curricular programs that stress the development of a wholesome attitude toward the importance of the proper use of leisure.
- Encourage a wide range of curricular activities which challenge the interest of all students, are characterized by the development of lifelong proficiencies, and are participatory rather than spectatorial.
- Develop in the secondary schools a comprehensive orientation and introduction to stress the potential benefits of cultural and recreational careers.

- Implement an ambitious and sustained program in institutions of higher education for training and retraining personnel to assure the availability of highly trained specialists in recreation and related specializations. The federal government should expand its fellowship and grant programs in this area also.
- Develop internships for children and youth through cooperative efforts with governmental units and private agencies as a strategy for increasing vocational and avocational interests in leisure. Internship programs should be of all types: formally organized, part-time employment, and voluntary service.
- Make the salaries and other compensatory benefits of professional personnel in leisure fields commensurate with other professions having comparable training and experience requirements to help develop and sustain career commitments.
- Assume a leadership position in providing research and development activities in leisure, particularly at higher education institutions. Further, local community and state agencies and organizations should increasingly seek the technical and planning assistance of existing institutions and promote and support their efforts to function effectively as a necessary and critical component in providing leisure to the nation's children.

4. Research and development in leisure time activities should be greatly expanded by the federal government and the states.

Especially critical at this time is a concerted effort to discover truths about the following questions:

- Are there sufficient quantities of quality leisure time activities available in the community that are specifically geared to satisfy the unique social and psychological needs of children?
- To what extent do prevailing physical, social, and economic environmental features in a community shape the leisure time activity patterns and preferences of children and what can be done to accentuate positive features and overcome those features that are negative?
- How should leisure time activities for children be structured and presented to provide optimal childhood education for subsequent adolescent and adult leisure interest and skills?
- To what extent and for what purposes should community-based human service agencies and organizations develop and support a structured program of leisure time activities for children?
- What impact does the lack of meaningful and constructive leisure time activity have upon the child, his family, his community?

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